

Old Custom House,
Portsmouth, New Hampshire
Rockingham Co.

HABS NO. NH-4

HABS
N.H.

3-PORT

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Written Historical and Descriptive Data
District No. NH

Historic American Buildings Survey
Professor Eric T. Huddleston, District Officer
University of New Hampshire.

Contributed by New Hampshire E.R.A.

University^{and} of New Hampshire
Durham, New Hampshire

CUSTOM HOUSE

CORNER OF DANIEL AND PENHALLOW STREETS

PORTSMOUTH ROCKINGHAM CO. NEW HAMPSHIRE

<u>Owner</u>	Mrs. James H. Dow, 122 Chapel Street
<u>Date of Erection</u>	1816. Built for Langley Boardman and John Abbott.
<u>Architect</u>	Unknown
<u>Builder</u>	Unknown
<u>Present Condition</u>	Structurally sound. Need general repair and paint. Trim at entrance missing. Shutters missing. Blinds taken off. New sash first floor.
<u>Number of Stories</u>	Three
<u>Materials of Construction</u>	Walls and cornice brick. Roof slate. Base granite. Wood framing.
<u>Other Existing Records</u>	"Portsmouth Historic and Picturesque" by C. S. Gurney. Portsmouth 1902. Illustration and text. Foster's Guide Book of Portsmouth 1898. A Portsmouth daily newspaper, probably the Portsmouth Herald. Dec. 26, 1908 Article entitled "Old Custom House" by James H. Dow. Drawing of main entrance (incorrect) See Georgian Period, Part VI Pl. 403 Registry of Deeds at Exeter.

CUSTOM HOUSE
PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

HISTORY

Built after the Great Fire of 1813 for Langley Boardman and John Abbott.

Purchased by U. S. Government 1817.

Auctioned by U. S. Government to Mr. Isaac Dow 1867.

Passed to his son, Mr. James H. Dow.

Present owner - Mrs. James H. Dow.

Used as a Post-Office and Custom House 1817 to 1860.

Used as office of Provost Marshal 1860 to 1867.

Rented now as two stores and lofts.

"On Aug. 21, 1817, the United States government purchased of Langley Boardman and John Abbott the three story brick building on the corner of Daniel and Penhallow streets, probably but recently built at that date. Timothy Upham was collector at this period and must have found the new quarters a most decided improvement over the old office, where space was limited. The government found it necessary to make some changes from time to time, the postoffice department occupying much room on the street floor. The mail business even at this period in the town's history was no small matter, and in and out of that corner entrance to the postoffice passed many a merchant, ship owner, worthy citizens and men of note of those times, with lads and lasses, all eager for the distribution of the mails, which was not so frequent an event as in these more progressive years of cheaper postage."

"The government continued the business here until 1860, during which time some alterations were made on the second floor for office work. This was done by Thomas Martin, a prominent carpenter of those days, and the marble tablet marked "Custom House", which still remains on the Penhallow Street front, was placed there in 1838 by Mr. Martin, whose bill for carpenter work was \$375.00.

"But a more modern building was being constructed which at that time as now, proved one of the most substantial and ornamental buildings of our city, and being completed in 1860, the "Old Custom House" lost its identity as a government building and a move was made to the new quarters, where for generations yet to come the custom house and postoffice business will be well looked after.

"But there were other scenes to be enacted at the vacated office. The United States government retained the building and rented it for various purposes for several years. The incidents most worthy of historic mention were those that took place during the Civil War. Here was the office of the provost marshal and here gathered excited throngs during the days of enlistment of volunteers who were stirred to do battle for the cause of the Union. Fathers and mothers saw their sons march out for active service as soldiers. Smiles and tears mingled here in the partings. The stroke of a pen was attended with mighty interests, far more so than the "boy in blue" ever dreamed of. The enthusiasm of youth overcame all obstacles--and father and son marched out from the old custom

house to do battle for peace. Continued calls for troops kept the excitement at full blow, music and banners were familiar sounds and sights. Later on drafting was resorted to, and it was then that new scenes were enacted. The published lists of names drawn for service in the field were eagerly scanned and not always with satisfaction, one's name omitted brought a smile--also a fear that "my name may come next time."

"And then the substitute business. How the money did circulate, and what profits the brokers did pocket. At first a good sub could be obtained for a reasonable price, but like all other articles of sale, the prices kept pace with the demand and ere the draft was declared off prices went up to little less than a thousand dollars and of this the broker got a good share, for the quality of the subs went down as prices went up. There were some scenes of a riotous nature, on several occasions, as a resistance to the draft was manifested by sympathizers with the South.

"Peace came at last and the murmurs of bloody strife were stilled. Business resumed its usual conditions about the "Old Custom House". The United States government announced the sale of this historic building and on May 11, 1867 it was sold at public auction, the purchaser being Mr. Isaac Dow. The present owner, James E. Dow, has recently made noticeable changes and improvements to the building and the location being an excellent one for business, it is safe to say that it will long continue to be an attractive object associated as it is with historic events of old Portsmouth."

--Extract from a Portsmouth daily newspaper Dec. 26, 1908
entitled "Old Custom House" by James H. Dow. Probably the
Portsmouth Herald.

STRUCTURE

THE SIDE DOOR is taken from post card enclosed, paint
marks on the building and drawing in the Georgian Period,
Vol. VI, Plate 403.

When in bad repair it was taken down and stored in
present owner's barn and later given away for fire wood.

THE BLINDS of the second story window were found in the
attic.

THE SHUTTERS of the first story windows are taken from
post card enclosed.

SAFE - We think that the brick arch in the basement
carried a safe on the first floor as well as the present one
on the second floor. This is purely conjectural.

"It was built by Bulfinch according to local tradition."
--Foster's Guide Book. We have found no documentary evidence
of this.

Ernest A. Clark

Assistant Supervisor

Approved

E. J. Huddleston
District Officer

July 27, 1935

Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.

ADDENDA FROM REGISTRY OF DEEDS AT EXETER

JONATHAN FOLSOM to Book 212 Deeds Exeter
LANGELEY BOARDMAN and Page 1
JOHN ABBOTT

----beginning on Ark Street at the Southwesterly corner of Rindge Lane, thence Southerly on s'd Ark Street nineteen (19'-8") feet eight inches to land of Noah Smith and others, thence Easterly on said Smith's land and others carrying a parallel line with Sheafe Street 35'-6" to land of Jacob Marstins, thence Northerly by said Marstins land about 18 feet to said Rindge Lane, thence Westerly by said Rindge Lane 35'-6" to said Ark Street being the corner and bounds first mentioned-----beginning on Daniel Street at the Northeast-erly corner of Ark Street, and thence running Southerly on said Ark Street 70 feet to Rindge Lane, thence Easterly by said Rindge Lane 22'-2", thence Northerly carrying a parallel line with said Ark Street 70 feet to said Daniel Street, thence Westerly by said Daniel Street 22'-2" to the corner and bounds first mentioned-----beginning on said Ark Street at the Northwesterly corner of Sheafe Street, thence running on said Sheafe Street Easterly 35'-6" to land of said Jacob Marstin, thence Northerly by said Marstin's land 18'-8" to land of Noah Smith and others, thence Westerly by said Smith's land and others carrying a parallel line with said Sheafe Street 25'-6" to said Ark Street, thence Southerly by said Ark Street 18'-8" to the corner and bounds first mentioned.

 this 3rd day of April, 1816

NOTE: This deed is for only three lots of land--no building

LANGELEY BOARDMAN and
JOHN ABBOTT
UNITED STATES

to
Book 214
Page 532

Deeds Exeter

7.
N.H.
8-PORT

28-

---a certain building erected by us for a Custom House, and Public Warehouse, in the years 1816 and 1817, with the land on which the said building stands, being 1573 feet and 8 inches, situated and bounded as follows (viz.) - In the Town of Portsmouth in the State of New Hampshire, commencing on Daniel Street at the center of the partition wall, which divides the Custom House on the Eastern side from the building owned by Frink and Haseltine, and running through the center of said wall southwardly as far as the building of the said Frink and Haseltine extends, thence to include the whole wall to Rindge Street being 71 feet, then on Rindge Street Westwardly to Ark Street 22'-2", thence on Ark Street Northwardly 71 feet to Daniel Street, thence on Daniel Street Eastwardly 22'-2" to the bounds begun at; the land being the same which was conveyed to us the 3rd day of April 1816, by Johnathan Folsom, deed recorded in the Rockingham Records June 1, 1816, Lib. 212 fol. 1

this 21st day of August, 1817.

Rec. Sept. 20, 1817.

UNITED STATES
ISAAC DOW

to

Book 418
Page 307

Deeds

Exeter

Same description as the deed Boardman et al to United States.

---being the same premises which were conveyed to the United States by Langeley Boardman and John Abbott by deed dated August 21st, 1817 recorded in the Rockingham Records on the 20th September, 1817, Liber 214, Folio 532.

this 4th day of November, 1867

Rec. Nov. 12, 1867.

ISAAC DOW Administration #3148 Probate Exeter

8-PORT

Mary E. (wife)
James E. (son)
M. Lizzie (daughters)
Emma F. Fletcher

In the settlement of the estate the following was allowed:

Widow	\$4665.48
Lizzie	3106.96
Emma	3106.02
James	109.42 with previous receipts.

This is the only disposal of the estate. There are no deeds passed on this property and we believe that the "with previous receipts" in the above is the passing of the property to the son James, whose middle initial in the records is E. and in the history is H. The records show the son James as residing in Lowell, Mass.

The present owner is Mrs. James H. Dow. There is also another line on this property for the will of the widow Mary E. Dow, Vol. 225 Page 25, reads: 2nd-All the rest, residue and remainder of my property and estate of every description I give and bequeath to my brother, James H. Dow to have and to hold the same and use and enjoy the income thereof during the term of his natural life. 3rd from and after the termination of my said brother's life estate therein----I give, devise and bequeath to Mrs. Lucy A. Hartwell to have and to hold all the same to her and her heirs and assigns forever.

There is no probate on James H. at the present date.

How did the property pass to his wife?